

Welcome Address

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Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) I welcome you to this conference on Land Fragmentation and Land Consolidation in Central and Eastern European Countries.

At the same occasion, I would like to congratulate the organisers of this conference for their initiative and the efforts they have undertaken in order to create this forum. This platform will provide the opportunity to exchange experiences, joint learning, and the conception of new ideas. Your meeting shall also contribute to strengthen and expand existing networks among experts themselves and their clients, who are political decision makers and those women and men who are directly concerned by various aspects of land fragmentation and land consolidation.

Land issues are generally very complex. They carry a high degree of conflict potential. They are politically very sensitive. Who deals with land deals with probably the most important resource for rural livelihood. Processes of land consolidation do therefore play an important role in this context. Yet, they are certainly not the only remedy for all problems of social and economic development and environmental sustainability in rural areas. However, the implementation of land consolidation policies has the potential to stimulate and re-enforce other processes of change in the context of rural development. But, given the huge amount of financial and human resources required for a technically perfect implementation, one should always be aware of adequate alternatives and also consider cost-benefit relations with regard to overall development objectives.

Reading through the case studies which will be presented at this forum, this becomes obvious: Land consolidation policies which take into consideration the interests of all segments of a society – and beyond that, the interests of future generations – demand a tremendous amount of inputs, a large scope of skills, and a high degree of responsibility.

The degree to which our decisions of today may have an impact on development opportunities of future generations came to my mind, when I looked into the history of my own family and of the region, where this family comes from: The fact that I speak to you today on behalf of my ministry, can be directly linked to the land consolidation strategy of my forefathers. They had developed a custom, that only the oldest son could inherit the family farm. Instead of dividing the land among all heirs, the other sons – and sometimes daughters – received an education and some starting capital for their own business. In this way they established themselves as butchers, bakers, or teachers and so forth. Their children went also into new professional fields. In this way, our grandfathers had organised a significant transfer of human and capital resources into other sectors, which was at the basis of our economic development of today.

In summary: Any change, any intervention must be well considered and based on a large consensus in society. A maximum of people's participation, legal security, justice, and transparency are minimum requirements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

we are all aware, that amongst the large scope of first degree priorities, especially in countries which undergo a complex process of transformation, countries from Central and Eastern Europe are presently faced with a serious problem of insufficient resources. That is the reason, why the donor community has committed itself not only to share experiences with these countries, but also to assist financially and with advisory services. This is at the same time a challenge to all donor organisations. We know that we also have to learn how to improve the co-ordination of our assistance, how to better understand the real needs of local people concerned, and how to adjust our contributions to their needs. This conference aims at contributing to this learning process. I therefore appreciate that the conclusions of your meeting are planned to flow into the Regional Workshop on Land Rights, Institutions, and Policies in Eastern Europe in Budapest in April of this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you success for this symposium, fruitful discussions, and many applicable results. I am convinced that by Wednesday evening, we have learned a little more about what Land Consolidation can do, what it cannot do, how we can do it, and under which conditions we can do it better.

Thank you